



Wisconsin Alliance  
for Excellent Schools

## **School-funding update**

**Week of May 15, 2008**

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The Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools (WAES) is a statewide, independent, membership-based organization of educators, school board members, students, parents, community leaders, researchers, citizens, and community activists whose lone goal is the comprehensive reform of Wisconsin's school-funding system. If you would like more information about the organization -- or on becoming part of WAES -- contact Tom Beebe at 920-650-0525 or [tbeebe@wisconsinsfuture.org](mailto:tbeebe@wisconsinsfuture.org).

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### **WAES website is getting a new look**

It will be a while before it is finished, but we are in the process of giving a new look and feel to the WAES website in order to make it more user friendly and, most importantly, valuable to those involved in reforming the way Wisconsin funds its public schools.

At the present time, not much will look different, but that will change. For now, one of the new features is that you can join WAES online and send in your dues with a credit card or with *PayPal*. It should also be easier to sign up for and read the e-mail update and to register for a school-funding reform presentation.

Give the site a look-see at <http://www.excellentschools.org>. Let me know what features you feel would make it more valuable for you.

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### **WAES needs your support now more than ever**

Nothing seems to get any better for communities, schools, or children around the state in terms of the impact of the school-funding system. Staff is still being laid off, class sizes are still increasing, and programs and services are still being cut. The quality and quantity of education continues to take a hit in virtually every corner of Wisconsin.

Nothing will change until we demand that the Legislature and the Governor change a funding system that no longer works for children or for taxpayers. That is the sole purpose of WAES -- to make that demand and to work with the people of the state to make it happen.

As an independent, dues-supported, non-profit organization, WAES needs your help to continue this important work. As more and more school districts edge toward the brink of fiscal and educational crisis, this work and your support are more important than ever.

If you haven't joined already, now is the time to join WAES. It's very easy. First of all, you can go to our website at <http://www.excellentschools.org> and use PayPal or your credit card. If that doesn't work for you, go to [http://www.excellentschools.org/resources/membership\\_statement.pdf](http://www.excellentschools.org/resources/membership_statement.pdf) and print the Membership Statement. Fill it out and mail it, along with your check, to Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools, 315 Maple Street, Fort Atkinson, WI 53538. To get the dues structure for organizations -- or for more information -- contact Tom Beebe at 920-650-0525 or [tbeebe@wisconsinsfuture.org](mailto:tbeebe@wisconsinsfuture.org).

You can make a difference.

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### **Crandon School District is 100th member of WAES**

WAES passed a milestone earlier this week when the Crandon School District became the school-funding reform organization's 100th member -- a point reached in only four months.

Those organizations and individuals becoming dues-paying partners in the battle for reform since the last e-mail update were:

- Teacher groups: South West Education Association and Bayland Educators UniServ
- Individuals: Vickie Strattner, Mary Bartkowiak, and Paul Kusuda
- Parent organizations: Riverside University High School PTSA (Milwaukee)
- School districts: North Lakeland and Crandon
- Other groups: GrassRoots of Waukesha County

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### **Destruction of education predicted in northern Wisconsin**

You wouldn't think it would be possible, but after 15 years of a state school-funding formula that is both unfair and inadequate, things are actually getting worse in many school districts, including Rhinelander.

At a recent board meeting called to look at future cuts and possible budget shortfalls, school board President Charles Fitzgerald voiced the concerns of folks throughout the area when he said, "We are looking at the destruction of education in northern Wisconsin." The board's Operations and Strategic Planning Committee was discussing budget cuts and depletion of the fund balance following the failure of an April 1 referendum

<http://www.rhinelanderdailynews.com/articles/2008/05/13/news/doc4829b692b2e58782068740.txt>).

The most notable action item on the agenda was a proposed 10-percent reduction in classroom budgets for a savings of \$50,000. Board members drew a line in the sand and voted "no," explaining that they want to find other ways of saving the money that wouldn't negatively impact classrooms. A motion to withdraw \$700,000 from the district's fund balance did pass.

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### **Fix was only temporary -- Waukesha considers another referendum**

It's homework time for members of the school board and the community of Waukesha as they begin to look at the possibility of a referendum to boost the district's budget and prevent further staff and program reductions (<http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=751194>). At a recent board meeting, members talked about surveys and focus groups -- as well as actions, like closing schools, the district might be forced into to show the public its back is against the wall.

Passage of a \$4.9 million operating revenue referendum in 2001 gave the district only brief respite from the cycle of cutting programs and services. Because the present system no longer works for kids or schools, Waukesha -- since 2001 -- has cut scores of employee positions and raised class sizes. Also, the district has eliminated support staff such as elementary librarians and counselors. As a result, the district has lost the equivalent of 177 full-time employees, most of them teachers.

"This is our homework time," said board member Joseph Como, who suggested forming a diverse group of community members to study whether a referendum is the solution for the district's financial problems. "Let's get going on our homework," he urged the community.

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### **Lack of revenue drives a wedge between city and school district**

When WAES talks about school-funding reform, one point that is highlighted is that the present system has created fingers of anger and frustration that folks in communities around the state are pointing at each other -- instead of at the State Capitol where our elected officials need to get serious about the problem.

That type of community divide seems to be forming in the Ashland School District following a contentious budget debate earlier this week (<http://www.ashlandwi.com/articles/2008/05/20/news/doc4832d86a41355310978406.txt>). Looking at a plan to trim \$260,000 from the budget, board members voted to get \$50,000 of the shortfall by eliminating the middle school police liaison officer, feeling it was a relatively painless way to save money without affecting instruction. The vote went against a committee of the whole recommendation of cutting only \$25,000 (half the position) in hopes the city would fund the other half.

Superintendent Peggy Smith told the board and audience, "In the last message, they (the city) said, 'We're not going to pick up half of it; you have more money than we do.'" In another jolt to the board, it was learned that the city might charge the district \$19,000 in

annual storm water utility fees, prompting one board member to say "if we're going to get stuck getting bills like that, it's going to be taken from our kids' education." Reached later, Ashland Mayor Ed Monroe said the district should pay for the police liaison because the district is larger than the city. Addressing the storm water fee, Monroe said, "We don't mind paying our fair share, but we would like the school district to come up and pay theirs also."

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## **Energy prices create budget challenges in Melrose-Mindoro**

In last week's e-mail update we talked about the effects of rising food and fuel costs on school districts. That theme is continued this week in a story from the *Jackson County Chronicle* titled "Budget challenges at Mel-Min created by soaring energy prices (<http://www.jacksoncountychronicle.com/articles/2008/05/12/news/02energy.txt>)."

Superintendent Ron Perry recently told the Melrose-Mindoro School District Board that fuel prices -- including heating oil, propane, and fuel for the buses -- for the 2008-09 school year will be about \$93,000 more than last year. Since 2002, Perry said, fuel prices have gone up \$360,000. The superintendent said something else will have to be cut from the budget to pay the additional fuel costs.

Options under consideration are consolidating bus routes -- again -- changing middle school sporting events, and increasing vigilance on energy savings. The board also talked about lowering thermostats and more sweaters. "We're going to have to cut somewhere else to make things happen," Perry said. "But you cannot not have heat."

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**Help us better serve you by letting us know when you change your e-mail address. In that way we can stop sending the update to the old one and switch over to the new address as soon as possible.**

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## **School-funding reform calendar**

- May 28 -- School-funding reform presentation for a membership meeting of the Winnebagoland Uniserv (<http://www.weac.org/Winnebagoland/>), 5:30 p.m. (membership meeting starts), 325 Trowbridge Drive, Fond du Lac
- June 20 -- School-funding reform presentation as part of the finance class of the education leadership course offered through Edgewood College (<http://www.edgewood.edu/>), 10 a.m., DC Everest School District office (<http://www.dce.k12.wi.us/>), 6300 Alderson Street, Weston
- November 14 -- School-funding reform presentation at the Wisconsin School Social Workers Association Fall Conference (<http://www.wsswa.org>) at the Heidel House near Green Lake (<http://www.heidelhouse.com/>)

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*Please feel free to share your copy of the WAES school-funding update with anyone interested in this important public policy issue. Contact Tom Beebe at [tbeebe@wisconsinsfuture.org](mailto:tbeebe@wisconsinsfuture.org) or 920-650-0525 for details.*

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